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U.S. Energy Policy Leaders Continue to Support Nuclear Energy

The Relatively Moderate Impact of the Nuclear Accident at Fukushima Daichii

WASHINGTON, June 30, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- A June survey of private and public sector public policy elites in energy policy shows that the Fukushima nuclear accident has had little effect on the level of support for nuclear power in the United States.

The survey, conducted by APCO Insight, the research division of the consulting firm APCO Worldwide, and released today under the auspices of the non-profit American Council on Global Nuclear Energy, shows that 69% of energy policy makers and influentials continue to believe that nuclear energy should be a somewhat or very high priority for meeting future energy demand. A similar 65% have a favorable impression of nuclear energy for balancing environmental and energy needs. The priority and favorability assigned to nuclear energy has declined 5 percentage points since the initial survey of this key audience in November 2010.

"The survey results indicate a far more measured and thoughtful response to Fukushima Daichii than we experienced in this country after the accident at the Three Mile Island," concluded Scott Campbell, President of the American Council on Global Nuclear Competitiveness.

"Though awareness and concern over events in Fukushima are exceptionally high, the basic logic for the nuclear renaissance remains intact," said Mark Benson, the Chairman of APCO Insight and director of the survey. "People engaged in energy policy debates continue to see nuclear energy as a key part of the U.S. energy portfolio," he added.

However, even as support for nuclear energy remains relatively stable, interest in fossil fuels – particularly natural gas – have surged as energy policy leaders consider supply alternatives for the future. "Energy sources that are scalable show higher priority movement in the midst of supply uncertainties. Coal and oil are both showing gains. But natural gas has become the top energy priority for the future. At the same time, renewable energy sources have declined as priorities," Benson observed.

The analysis suggests that there is high confidence in the safety and efficiency of nuclear technology in spite of events in Japan that were triggered by an earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Indeed, nuclear energy compares favorably with other energy sources for improved safety and technological progress over time. 76% believe nuclear energy has become somewhat or much safer than it was 20 years ago. This compares with 50% for offshore oil and gas, 64% for onshore oil and gas and 64% for hydroelectric power. "Although the intensity of that safety assessment for nuclear energy has declined in the aftermath of Fukushima, with the percentage saying it's 'much safer' declining 10 points, the overall assessment remains quite favorable in comparison to any alternative," noted Benson.

Three themes are strongly associated with driving support for nuclear energy: technology assurances; reliability, and a favorable emissions profile.

Specific arguments include:

Technology, new regulation and better reactor designs provide improved margins of safety for nuclear power. (86% very or somewhat strong argument)

New technology has made nuclear energy among the most reliable and affordable sources of electricity. (62% very or somewhat strong argument)

Nuclear energy is essential because it provides 20% of the power supply regardless of weather, while wind and solar are intermittent and provide less than 2%. (72% very or somewhat strong argument.)

Emissions-free nuclear is essential to deal with climate change. Renewable energy can't meet energy demand and fossil fuels account for 35% of greenhouse gas emissions. (66% very or somewhat strong argument.)

Views on specific nuclear energy policies remain mostly unchanged since October 2010. Support for the Obama Administration's federal loan guarantee program remains strong at 60% approval and 25% disapproval. 71% of U.S. energy

policy activists also agree that foreign partnerships will be essential to reinvigorating the U.S. nuclear industry. "There is strong recognition that the U.S. industry has not made major U.S. investments in more than a generation. There is an active debate about access to a domestic talent pool and awareness that the U.S. will need to look overseas for partners," said Benson.

Finally, ongoing events in Japan are clearly of great interest to the audience. Fully 90% of U.S. energy policy activists are following events in Japan somewhat or very closely. At the same time, however, most expect that the nuclear energy industry will emerge as a safer sector in the aftermath of the Fukushima accident. Asked to take sides in a debate, 75% embrace the argument that the nuclear industry will "learn from events at Fukushima and safety will improve because of it." 21% side with the argument that the industry "has not learned enough from events at Fukushima and safety will continue to be a problem." Importantly, there is a significant division of opinion on this debate between Republicans and Democrats, with a 32 point difference between groups. Nonetheless, a majority of Democrats believe the industry will emerge safer.

"Fukushima is a signature event that has not yet concluded. However, the expectations described by U.S. energy policy activists suggest that the underlying logic of nuclear power is still decisive," according to Benson. "There's little doubt that the sector has made significant progress in the minds of energy policy makers. To the extent that Fukushima is perceived as an outlier and not a systemic problem, I would expect support for the nuclear renaissance to remain strong."

The survey was funded by Rosatom, the Russian nuclear energy corporation. Rosatom holds leading positions in the world market of nuclear technologies, while providing 40% of the world uranium enrichment services and 17% of the world nuclear fuel market. Rosatom expects to commission four nuclear facilities in Russia and abroad in 2011 and remains interested in increasing its work in the United States. Rosatom's subsidiary TENEX recently launched a U.S. affiliate, TENAM, headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland.

ABOUT APCO INSIGHT

APCO Insight is the opinion research division of APCO Worldwide, a global communications consultancy with 30 offices in 20 countries throughout the world. Insight is a full service research organization with experience in over 70 countries on 5 continents.

About the American Council of Global Nuclear Competitiveness

Formed in 2005, the American Council on Global Nuclear Competitiveness is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks the return of American nuclear leadership to the world through the emergence of an U.S.-led global nuclear enterprise. The Council is co-chaired by former U.S. senators Howard Baker, Jr., Bennett Johnston and Ambassador Paul Robinson. The Council educates key audiences on the policies and technologies of an American nuclear renaissance and summons public and private sector leadership to organize and promote such a transformation. Since its formation, the American Council has sponsored a series of studies on the job creation potential of an American Nuclear Renaissance and on the role that small modular reactors can play emerging markets worldwide.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This survey is based on a random sample of 200 "energy policy elites." The sample frame is developed from several proprietary listed sources from which qualified candidates are identified. Lists are then crossed with other sources to create a source for random selection. Potential respondents are pre-notified and contacted by trained interviewers to further screen them for "policy elite" criteria and interview scheduling. Respondents are incentivized through a contribution to a list of charities for each completed interview. No respondent is directly compensated for participation in the survey. A sample of 200 is subject to a sampling error of plus/minus 6.3%. Subgroups within the sample are subject to larger error.

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